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Viewing cable 08ATHENS833, GREEK TEHERAN ENVOY URGES U.S.-IRAN TALKS, OFFERS

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Understanding cables

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- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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| Reference ID | Created | Released | Classification | Origin |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 08ATHENS833 | 2008-06-11 15:11 | 2011-08-30 01:44 | SECRET | Embassy Athens |

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TAGS: [GR](#) [IR](#) [POV](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: GREEK TEHERAN ENVOY URGES U.S.-IRAN TALKS, OFFERS
ASSISTANCE

REF: A. ATHENS 32 B. ATHENS 61

Classified By: DCM Tom Countryman. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: In separate conversations with A/PolCouns and DepPolCouns, former Greek Ambassador to Iran and new head of the MFA D1 Directorate for International Organizations Merkourios Karafotias offered his interpretation of Iranian motives in recent events and urged the U.S. to open discrete talks with Teheran -- which Karafotias offered to help initiate. (Karafotias said he was not acting on a request from the Iranians, nor was it clear whether his superiors in

the MFA had knowledge of his efforts.) Iranian bellicose statements and actions were their clumsy way of etting Washington's attention. Such talks, Karafotias argued, while likely rocky at first, could lead to lessened tensions and more energy supplies. END SUMMARY.

12. (S) Karafotias, who completed a three-year tour as Greece's Ambassador in Tehran in May, said current Western policy toward Iran was "not the best" and was effectively serving Iran up on a platter to the Russians and Chinese. The fact that the Russians and Chinese were historical enemies of Iran was an indication how far Western policy toward Iran had gone awry. Within this context, the Iranians were interested in dialogue with the Europeans, but it was the Americans they really cared about. Whenever Karafotias met with Iranians the first thing they asked about was what was up in Washington. The Iranians believed they could handle their neighbors and it was only the U.S. that scared them.

13. (S) Iran's aggressive statements had "nothing to do with reality" and were only the Iranians' clumsy way of trying to get the U.S. to pay attention so discussions could begin. The Iranians believed they were getting contradictory signals from Washington and were searching for ways to start a dialogue. Even Iranian support for Hizballah in Lebanon, while pressuring Israel, was really an attempt to get Washington's attention. When asked why, if the Iranians wanted talks so badly, they did not take some initial positive step, such as halting weapons support for Shia forces in Iraq, coming clean with the IAEA, or cutting support for terrorists in Lebanon, Karafotias said it was a combination of national pride and ignorance of Western ways. From the Iranian vantage point, the louder and more bellicose the statements, the greater the chance of getting U.S. attention and beginning a dialogue. The Iranians, Karafotias said, did not give a wit for the Shia in Iraq or Hizballah but by supporting them, they hoped to talk to Washington.

14. (S) The Iranians would want to see several things emerge from such talks: U.S. investment in Iran, deals with U.S. companies on energy extraction technology, and security guarantees from the U.S. On the latter, Karafotias said the Iranians, despite their strong statements, wanted to re-create some elements of the relationship the U.S. had with the Shah. Iran did not now want to be a proQe region, but it did want the attention and respect it thought it still deserved. Iran was no longer interested in exporting Islamic revolution. Indeed, Iran was now amongst the least strict Islamic countries. What could result from an improved relationship would be eased tensions and more energy supplies.

15. (S) As for how such talks could take place, Karafotias suggested a secret meeting on a small Greek island, preferably during the off-season and out of sight of any journalists. Greece, he said, had a "special relationship" with Iran -- the Iranians "listened to the Greeks. Karafotias said he met regularly with Iranian officials and could help facilitate the process. (He had also met with the Israeli Ambassador a few days before, presumably to discuss a similar Iranian-Israeli dialogue.) But we would have to be prepared for some Iranian gamesmanship. The first meeting or two would likely be dominated by Iranian venting at the wrongs they perceived had been done them. But after several meetings, the Iranians would calm down and real progress could take place. Indeed, with some effort, the nuclear problem would "melt away." That issue, he argued, should be seen as the effect, not the cause, of bad relations between Iran and the West.

16. (S) COMMENT: It is difficult for us to judge Karafotias' authority, either with the Iranians or within the MFA. Greece has, however, been proactive in representing U.S. interests to the Iranians in such matters as the case of missing Amciti Levinson. Moreover, judging by Iranian high-level visits to Athens, the Greeks do appear to have a working relationship with the Iranians. Should Washington decide to open a channel to Teheran, the Greeks could perhaps

help facilitate the contact.

LEVINSON CASE

17. (S) DepPolCouns inquired about further information on missing Amcit Levinson, whose case Karafotias had addressed with the Iranians while in Teheran (refs A and B). While warning that his information might be only "half right" and that the Iranians may well have "lied" to him, Karafotias said he got the distinct impression that they did not know what happened to Levinson. He believed that if the Iranians did have him, they would have made a show for world public consumption, much the way they did in the case a year ago of Iranian-American academic Haleh Esfandiari. Karafotias speculated that Levinson may have been murdered by bandits/smugglers operating in northern Iran.

BIO NOTE

18. (SBU) `haps, in his early fiftieQ@e walked with a crutch, tn injury he acquiredpan. On his earlierened the Gr` in 1986. of years dealing wiQh Greek-Turkish relations. He did a stint in the President's office and was also posted in Baku. In Iran, he infrequently traveled outside the country, as many other ambassadors did, preferring to stay in Teheran to learn the Iranian mindset.

SPECKHARD